

Letter to the Courier Editor

City Response to VSSP Parking Reductions

In its June 4 edition, the Courier ran a reader comment letter titled “*Village South Parking Reductions*.” The letter mischaracterizes the parking requirements of the Village South Specific Plan (VSSP) and contains factual inaccuracies that should be understood before the City Council reviews the VSSP on June 22, 2021.

The VSSP is a City-sponsored planning document, not a development project. If approved, it would provide new zoning and design guidelines that are intended to facilitate the redevelopment of 24 acres located immediately south of the Claremont Village. The Specific Plan represents the community’s vision for this largely underutilized area. Due to the Plan Area’s location adjacent to Claremont’s job centers and regional transit hub, the VSSP is designed to be a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). Accordingly, it includes a mix of uses, increased density, and an emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle connections to transit and surrounding jobs and services.

Despite the VSSP’s focus on creating a TOD, the minimum parking requirements contained on Page 122 of the document are relatively conservative and best described as suburban. Past staff reports have included a table comparing these standards to nearby TOD’s as well as the Village Expansion project located directly north of the VSSP area. In recognition of these relatively high minimum parking requirements, the plan also recognizes the need to provide flexibility for projects that warrant parking reductions due to their physical design, mix of uses, and parking management policies.

To provide the City with flexibility to “right-size” the parking for development projects on a case-by-case basis, a toolbox of potential reductions is included on Page 121 of the VSSP document. These include reductions for: charging for individual parking spaces as opposed to providing two or more spaces free of charge per residential unit (unbundling), shared parking for projects with a mix of uses that have offsetting peak parking demands such as hotel (evening) and office (weekdays), car-sharing (e.g. Zip Cars), and provision of bicycle facilities. Similar reductions are already available in the City’s zoning code and have been used successfully for decades.

The reader letter describes these potential parking reductions as shocking and developer driven. It characterizes them as by right reductions with no oversight or discretion by the City. It concludes that there would be “far less than one parking place available for each unit, even when residents are willing to pay for it”. This is simply not true. All reductions are discretionary and must first be justified through detailed parking demand studies and a project-specific parking management plan. Any proposed reductions would first be reviewed by City staff and, if warranted, would then require Planning Commission approval prior to development of any project. Approved parking reductions would then require a legal agreement to secure any shared parking arrangements and ensure they are not changed unilaterally. The City is required to be

a party to these agreements, which allows on-going City oversight to prevent undesirable changes in the future.

In another mischaracterization, the letter describes the car-sharing provision as cutting 300 spaces from the project area. This assumes the project will be home to over 75 dedicated car-sharing spaces. While that would be a wonderful development for the City, it is not realistic. Zip Car has operated successfully for many years at the Claremont Colleges. That success is based on 13 total spaces for the entire college population. While it would be great to have an even more successful operation in Village South, it is unlikely to include more than 10 spaces at this time. The result would be a reduction of 40 spaces upon full build out of the entire plan area.

Finally, the reader letter describes the project as massive and incorrectly states that the project is for up to 2,960 new residents. This appears to be based on a transposition error by the authors, which is based on a very rough projection contained in the Draft EIR (2,690). This projection has since been revised down to 1,785 total residents upon full build out of the plan area, which is expected to occur over many years and perhaps decades.

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